

**Statement of Representative David Price
Before the House Committee on Rules
March 30, 2006**

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the chance to appear before you today, and I want to begin by commending you for the leadership you have offered during the first year of the House Democracy Assistance Commission. As the ranking minority member, I am proud of my own leadership role on the Commission. We have operated in a totally bipartisan fashion and have already begun to work with seven partner countries to assist in developing their institutions of democracy.

I also commend the Chairman for drafting a package of reforms that addresses some of the most blatant ethical abuses we have witnessed in this and recent Congresses. Drawing bright lines that deter and discourage abuses and preserving the legitimacy of this institution in the eyes of the American people should be our immediate goals, and this proposal would take a significant step toward achieving them.

But I am here today to urge the Committee to adopt an approach that is in some ways more discriminating—for example, with regard to congressional travel—and in other ways more comprehensive—for example, with regard to how the House is being run.

First, we must think very carefully about what to do about privately-funded travel. This is obviously a highly contentious issue, and at first blush a one-year moratorium on all private travel would appear to be an attractive fall-back option.

But we should have no illusions that a one-year moratorium would be a painless way to kick the issue down the road while the Ethics Committee or someone else develops more stringent guidelines. A moratorium would mean a devastating loss to reputable, non-profit educational foundations of hundreds of thousands of dollars already invested in upcoming conferences, as well as a lost opportunity for Members to become better-informed on important issues.

I see no compelling reason why we should not act now to establish rules for member travel. The legislation introduced by Mr. Obey, Mr. Frank, Mr. Allen and I provides a workable approach that was the subject of extensive

deliberation. Under our plan, in order to accept privately-funded travel, Members and staff would have to certify:

1. That no lobbyists have been invited on the trip;
2. That the sponsor does not conduct lobbying activities itself;
3. That the sponsor neither employs nor contracts with a registered lobbyist for such activities; and
4. That the trip was not financed by corporate funds unless through tax-deductible contributions to the sponsoring organization, which must be fully disclosed in the travel certification.

A related issue is the use of corporate jets by Members of Congress. While the package currently before the Committee contains some limited reforms in this area, the presence of lobbyists on these flights is only part of the problem. If a company can let a Member fly all over the country in a charter jet while paying only commercial fare, we have left the door open to at least the perception of corruption, whether a lobbyist is on board or not. The Obey-Price-Frank-Allen package would require Members to pay the full market value of charter flights and to fully disclose who is on board and why a commercial flight was not used.

As I suggested at the outset, however, a debate focused only on lobbyist disclosure and travel and gift rules risks missing the forest for the trees. In the words of congressional scholars Norman Ornstein and Thomas Mann:

This is not simply a problem of a rogue lobbyist... Nor is it a matter of a handful of disconnected, corrupt lawmakers taking favors in return for official actions... The problem starts not with lobbyists but inside Congress. Over the past five years, the rules and norms that govern Congressional deliberation, debate and voting... have routinely been violated, *especially* in the House of Representatives, in ways that mark a dramatic break from custom.

It is in this area where I believe the reform package before the Committee falls dangerously short. So, I join my colleagues here today in asking you to review the recommendations found in our 14-point reform package, which contains several provisions designed to ensure that every law we pass is the

deliberate product of the legislative process designed by our Founding Fathers and refined over more than two hundred years of history. Among other things, our proposal would:

- 1. Require printed copies of legislation to be made available at least 24 hours before a vote, waived only by a two-thirds majority;**
- 2. Require bipartisan consent to hold open votes for longer than 20 minutes;**
- 3. Require a formal, open, and on-the-record meeting of a conference committee to resolve any and all differences between House and Senate versions of a bill; and**
- 4. Prohibit the consideration of any conference report materially different from the one reported by the conference, waived only by unanimous consent.**

Mr. Chairman, I commend these proposals to you as a way of addressing lobbying and travel abuses without damaging the legitimate and important work of educational and religious organizations. I also ask that the Committee consider the governance of the house, not merely as a matter of fairness to the minority party, but as a means of enhancing the effectiveness and legitimacy of this institution.